



Submission to the Loneliness Taskforce

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Introduction

The proposals below are offered as a first contribution by Age Action to the national conversation on loneliness begun by this process. We look forward to further involvement and are committed to participating as fully as possible work.

Combatting loneliness will need political prioritisation and deep commitment from a range of actors, both statutory and non-statutory. The general public, voluntary sector and also the business community all have key roles to play in improving the quality of lives of people who experience loneliness.

Age Action considers that a cross cutting, cross party and cross sectoral approach is the way to ensure that a manageable and feasible action plan is produced. We see integration of all initiatives, projects and programmes as critical to the success of this venture. We want a clear action plan which clearly delineates the actions, accountability lines, budgets, outcomes and indicators/metrics at every level where work is happening; national, regional and local.

Short-term proposals (that can be introduced immediately)

Representativeness

A multi sectoral approach to loneliness must be prioritised, resourced and led by Government to include all relevant actors. Inter and intra sectoral approaches must be encouraged to ensure close cooperation and to result in more cost-effective impacts that reach more people.

1. Ensure that the Loneliness Taskforce has the right mix of experience and skills from both the statutory and non-statutory sectors. Selection of Taskforce members must be transparent and based on appropriate competences, knowledge and experience. Terms of reference for this Taskforce must address the important issues of oversight, accountability and reporting structures.

Mapping

2. Commission a short piece of research to conduct a mapping exercise. This desk top research should list the following:
 - All Government strategies, policies and structures which reference loneliness. List Department owner, accountable persons, stated aims, objectives, targets, metrics and outcomes. Briefly state current status of stated outcomes.
 - All local authority strategies, structures and mechanisms, particularly the Local Community Development Committees, and all initiatives which operate at regional level to bring various actors together; Public Participation Networks, Local Economic and Community Plans to improve coordination and collaborative approaches to enhancing quality of life and well-being of communities.¹

Research

3. Commission social research which quantifies in monetary terms the cost of loneliness to the Exchequer and its negative impact on our social capital.

Engagement

4. Develop, monitor and evaluate a wide range of models and approaches which facilitate participative citizen engagement on how to combat loneliness. As wide a range as possible of methodologies should be used. Existing mechanisms should be

¹ <http://drcd.gov.ie/local-community-development-committees-lcdcs/> accessed 9 April 2018.

also be used such as Public Participation Networks and Local Economic and Community Plans.

5. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment should develop age appropriate modules on loneliness for primary and second level students, particularly in the SPHE Junior Certificate curriculum.

Medium term proposals (that may require a longer lead in period)

Political commitment

The impact of loneliness on many thousands of Irish people must be acknowledged as a challenge which has not been fully integrated into health and social care strategies to date. A long-term commitment must be made to combatting loneliness. Accountability for this must lie with the Minister for Health.

6. Appoint a Minister of State within the Department for Health with a brief on combatting loneliness. This Minister must spearhead, report on and account for progress to the Minister for Health who must bring progress reports to Cabinet.
7. Create clear accountability and a robust feedback mechanism from the Taskforce to the Minister for State.

Long-term proposals (that may require long term planning or significant changes)

Data analysis

Evidence based decision making is vital to ensure that scarce resources will be allocated to measures which can be shown to result in improved outcomes. Investment decisions on data gathering must be evidence based.

8. The need for an integrated approach and proper, long-term, resourcing of data collection and analysis of loneliness related measures must be prioritised and ringfenced by Government.

Engagement

9. Ensure that the learning from successful initiatives continues to be shared in a strategic and collaborative way to facilitate scale up of initiatives to reach more people.